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SUBJECT: IRANIAN FOREIGN MINISTER LEADS DELEGATION TO GAMBIA

SUMMARY

1. On March 27, 2009, a high-powered Iranian delegation led by Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottaki arrived in Banjul on a two-day working visit, highlighting several areas of cooperation between the two countries. Although Iranian engagement here is on the rise, at this point there is more talk than substance.

BILATERAL COOPERATION

[¶2.](#) Officials of the two governments held a series of meetings, including a closed door session with Vice President Aja Isatou Njie-Saidy, who doubles as the Chairperson of the National Security Council (NSC).

[¶3.](#) Mr. Mottaki's delegation included at least 10 officials, including the Deputy Energy Minister. Mottaki told the official media (who were the only ones invited to cover the visit) in an interview that their "priority here [in The Gambia] is agriculture. We have agreed to open an office here with a representative of our Ministry of Agriculture to work on projects".

[¶4.](#) The Iranian envoy also spoke of Tehran's desire to assist with the exportation of The Gambia's agricultural produce and also hinted about future engagement in the energy sector. Mottaki also expressed a commitment to explore opportunities in The Gambia's commercial and banking sectors.

COMMENTS

[¶5.](#) Relations between The Gambia and Iran gained momentum in 2006, following the participation of President Mahmoud Ahmedinejad in the African Union Summit held in Banjul. Although the relationship has been warm, the level of Iranian development assistance in The Gambia remains very limited particularly compared to Taiwan, The Gambia's main benefactor. This is the second Iranian delegation to visit The Gambia since December 2008. (REFTEL Banjul 000387) It is notable that the previous delegation, led by a provincial Governor, was received by Jammeh with much fanfare. It is curious that Gambian vice President Dr. Isatou Njie-Saidy and not President Jammeh met with this delegation, led by the foreign minister.

WELLS